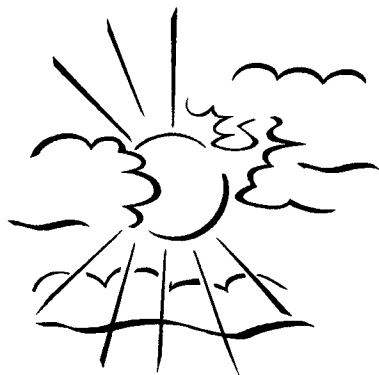


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

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LOCAL COMMENT: Why let families, kids suffer more?

House budget plan would cut deeper into already minimal aid and services

Detroit Free Press

June 26, 2005

BY CHRIS KOLB AND MARIANNE UDOW

Over the last few weeks, there has been a lot of rhetoric and misinformation about the welfare system and the families Michigan serves through the state Department of Human Services. It is time to set the record straight.

On June 9, the Michigan House passed an ill-conceived and poorly researched omnibus budget bill that would have a devastating impact on many Michigan families. The House prefers to protect corporate tax loopholes over Michigan families.

The cuts to human services will have a dramatic effect not just on poor families but also on the quality of life of all citizens in Michigan.

There is no argument that those who are capable of supporting themselves and becoming self-sufficient should do so. Public tax dollars should never be used to support able-bodied adults who are capable of functioning independent of state support.

But the cuts offered by the House will eliminate benefits to some of our most fragile families. These families, often struggling with mental illness and chronic health problems, are reliant on state programs to provide necessary support for food, clothing and shelter. If passed, the House bill would eliminate the social safety net for thousands of these families.

The House would end cash assistance support for 48,000 people in Michigan, including 36,000 children, simply because they have needed this support for four years. These are our most fragile families. Many are already working but in such low wage jobs that they are still living below the poverty level. Others are dealing with devastating health issues or disabilities, or caring for a disabled family member. More than half are functionally illiterate.

Eliminating cash assistance for families most in need will leave children hungry and less able to learn. Many will end up in foster care when their parents can no longer afford clothing or basic shelter.

The House would also cut assistance levels by over \$500 for those vulnerable families. Our cash assistance levels in Michigan have not been increased for 15 years. For a family of three, cash assistance provides \$5,500 per year -- an income that is 65% below the poverty

level. No one is getting rich on the assistance payments we make now. Reducing the rates for our poorest citizens is shortsighted and unconscionable.

The House would cut child care an additional \$38 million. Payment levels will be so low our children will be put at risk of being left in unsafe situations so parents can go to work. Or, in some cases, parents will no longer be able to go to work because child care will become totally unavailable or unaffordable; 43,000 children will bear the brunt and suffer as a result of these cuts.

The House cuts would further reduce the number of workers who provide child abuse services and adult protective services, food stamps, emergency financial and other help to those who cannot otherwise meet their basic needs.

These public servants work tirelessly despite the fact that many of them carry unmanageable caseloads of from 250-400 -- a 38% increase in caseloads over the past five years. Despite the critical role they play in the safety and stability of our communities, the House bill would force cuts of an additional 700 department staff. This is a recipe for a disaster.

Not only does the House budget fail to reflect the values of our state, it is not fiscally smart. The state would return \$97 million in federal dollars to Washington to save \$79 million in state funds. State costs will increase in other areas as basic support services are denied. For example, if we take away a family of four's \$6,600 annual cash assistance, leaving the parent unable to provide the most basic living standard for their children, these children may well end up in the foster care system. That costs \$19,000 per year per child -- a much less humane and more costly alternative to cash assistance for their families.

The House budget does not reflect the kind of community in which Michigan citizens want to live. We want children to be cared for and poor families helped -- not thrown on the streets. We need to focus on providing these families with the skills and resources to become as self-sufficient as possible instead of ending their assistance forever.

CHRIS KOLB is a state representative from Ann Arbor. MARIANNE UDOW is director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. Write to them in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48226.

In Lansing - voodoo redux

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Last week, Republicans in Lansing unveiled their counterproposal to Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm's single business tax reform plan. It was nothing more than voodoo-nomics redux.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema started beating the drum on a GOP plan that would eliminate the tax on all businesses over 19 years, by one-tenth of a percentage point a year. It was in response to Gov. Granholm's plan, which would have lowered the single business tax on manufacturers and increased it on insurers, banks and other enterprises.

Granholm's plan was revenue neutral, which in plainspeak means the tax changes wouldn't harm the budget.

The GOP plan would cost the state \$142 million in 2006 alone. Critics said the state would lose nearly \$2 billion a year by 2025.

Granholm's plan had its faults, but the Republican plan is irresponsible -- risking future funding for schools, roads, health care and local revenue sharing (for things such as police).

Sikkema argued that the job growth spurred by the tax cuts would bring the state additional revenues. It was a reprise of Reagan-era supply side economics, which maintained that cutting taxes would increase the federal government's tax receipts -- voil! -- by increasing economic activity.

It led to unprecedented budget deficits.

And if tax cuts are sparks to economic growth, where are the jobs from the Engler years? Engler's vaunted policy of steady tax cuts extended into the Granholm administration. Yet Michigan holds the dubious distinction of having the nation's highest unemployment rate. Its budget is in a shambles.

Republicans assailed Granholm's plan as a tax shift, yet Sikkema and company are betting on increasing income tax receipts through job creation. If it worked, it would shift the tax burden to individuals from businesses. But it wouldn't work. It's based on the conceit that companies would flock to Michigan because of a one-tenth of one percentage point business tax cut.

Michigan must invest more in education, roads and other health care if it is to have any hope of joining the global economic winners. Deeper tax cuts will devastate the state -- not help it grow.

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Starving government

Detroit Free Press
Letters to the editor
June 26, 2005

I've watched with amusement as Republican members of the state House have sent out news releases and flyers patting themselves on the back for "balancing the budget without raising revenue."

Well, I've got news for anyone who would vote to balance the state's budget on the backs of the most needy. Even welfare recipients are forbidden from voluntarily reducing their income -- if they do so, they are penalized. So should be the Republicans.

It should be no mystery to anyone who follows the news that 75% of the current economic crisis in Michigan is the direct result of the tax cuts the Legislature passed in the late 1990s. Only 25% is due to the economic downturn Michigan has experienced, and with

\$3 billion already cut from state expenses, the economic factor has already been more than accounted for.

What we are dealing with now is a group of right-wing fanatics who run for a government office but hate government. After their 6- or 8-year-terms, they get retirement for life and move on to the really big-dollar jobs as lobbyists.

It's far past time for Gov. Jennifer Granholm to start acting and talking like a Democrat and start educating the public about the real reason such drastic cuts have been made and proposed. It's a sad day when one considers the fact that previous generations have been willing to pay enough taxes to build this country, and today's leaders aren't even willing to maintain it. Raise my taxes; it's the only humane thing to do.

Jim McCormick

Grant

GOP tax plan

Cut for business would pose threat to vital state services

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema sets up a false choice for Lansing policymakers when he says they must choose between feeding the state budget or promoting economic growth.

In pushing a Republican plan to phase out the state's main business tax by 2025, Sikkema implies a loss of \$1.9 billion annually in tax revenue by then poses little consequence.

That's asking too large a leap of faith, especially when Gov. Jennifer Granholm has a more reasonable tax overhaul that focuses help on the state's main jobs providers - its struggling manufacturers. The governor has proposed cutting the Single Business Tax from 1.9 percent to 1.2 percent next year, plus installing other changes that manufacturers say will make their operations more affordable and Michigan's business tax system more fair.

Granholm's plan also retains current business support of government, which would allow Michigan to sufficiently finance education and other services that enhance its competitiveness.

What irks some businesses and Republican lawmakers is that certain companies, such as insurers, would pay more under the governor's proposal. However, that is not inherently unfair or unhealthy for Michigan's business climate.

Whether employers find this state desirable is based on many factors, with tax rates being just one. Sikkema is too savvy not to know this, and therefore shouldn't back legislation that would undermine Michigan's future.

OTHER STATES MUST FIX BUDGET ISSUES THIS WEEK

Michigan's 2005-06 budget may have problems, but unlike 46 other states, lawmakers have time to hammer out the details.

Ten of those other states must fix their budget problems this week to comply with the start of the 2005-06 fiscal year, which begins July 1. Michigan's begins October 1, which clashes with some local government and school fiscal years but, at least for the moment, buys the state time to fix the budget. Of the 46 states that have a fiscal year beginning July 1, only 10 have not yet adopted budgets, but they include some of the nation's largest states and at least one of the 10 faces a possible government shutdown.

The Legislature is tentatively slated to meet every Wednesday this summer, as are the House Education and Commerce committees.

But where Michigan has the luxury of three extra months to finish its budget, California, Delaware, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin have not yet submitted a budget despite Friday's deadline.

Of those 10 states, Minnesota does not have a mechanism to keep government functioning after the new fiscal year begins. Wisconsin can continue functioning at 2005 budget levels on a month-to-month basis, while other states use temporary laws to keep government operating until something permanent is agreed upon.

A look at those 10 states and their unique situations:

CALIFORNIA: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed eliminating the budget shortfall by eliminating K-12 programs, some social services and some state employee compensation. Analysts say the plan will result in a \$2.9 billion surplus and reduce the longer-term shortfall in the state. The budget also increases funding to two state universities and would eliminate funding for annual base program contribution costs to the State Teacher's Retirement System, instead asking school districts to foot the bill. The Democrat-controlled Legislature expressed displeasure but approved the bill anyway to meet the deadline.

DELAWARE: The Legislature and Governor Ruth Ann Minner agreed on a \$2.74 billion operating budget June 15 and are now working on a \$700 million capital budget. Lawmakers agreed to cut the tax businesses pay on total sales by 20 percent and raise salaries for state employees across the board. Ms. Minner has proposed spending reserve

money gained from abandoned property costs on water, farmland and beach preservation projects. The plan also funds \$45.8 million in Medicaid increases.

MINNESOTA: The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to agree on a budget, with tax increases and Medicaid cuts the contentious issues. Because of Minnesota law, the government would shut down if a solution were not reached, similar to what happened in Tennessee in 2002 for three days. During that time, classes stopped at Tennessee public universities, road construction came to a halt and driver's licenses were not issued in the state, although vital services still continued. Minnesota almost shut down in 2001 but the Legislature was able to negotiate a last-minute budget agreement.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: Lawmakers have finished work on the \$2.7 billion budget, which cuts \$47 million from Governor John Lynch's original proposal. The biggest issue is a 28 cents-per-pack increase of cigarettes, which would go toward the school aid fund, although failure to fund 14 state troopers and a tax on nuclear power and gambling winnings are problems for some legislators. However, the budget is now awaiting the governor's signature.

NEW JERSEY: Although Democrats control the governor's office and both chambers of the Legislature, a finalized budget was still fiercely debated. Some wanted to reduce property tax rebates and raise the sales tax; in fact, one chamber proposed a 15 percent cut in every department, though it did not specify what exactly should be cut. A budget committee audited every department earlier this year to look for examples of waste. Despite the arguing, the state expects to have a balanced budget by June 30.

NORTH CAROLINA: The Senate shot down the House's version of the budget by a 0-43 vote, and both chambers are now in a conference committee to resolve the dispute. Among the issues are a 25 cents-per-pack cigarette excise tax (the Senate wanted 35 cents), more funding for education, cuts to Medicaid and more money for economic development, with tax increases to help pay for it all.

OREGON: This state meets once every other year to put together a two-year budget. As a result, no significant bills have made it to the Governor Ted Kulongoski's desk, but the Senate recently approved a resolution that would keep state agencies from shutting down July 1 (the House is expected to approve the resolution this week). The biggest bone of contention in the bill is how much to appropriate to K-12 schools, and the resolution will buy the Legislature a month to work it out.

PENNSYLVANIA: While some revenue growth is expected, federal funding reductions for Medicaid must be replaced by the state, or else the numbers served must be reduced, which Governor Ed Rendell has promised not to do. Education and public welfare, which make up three-fourths of the budget, would receive funding increases, but the budget has proposed a 6.6 percent cut in state departments. "Legislative initiatives," one-time special projects for individual lawmakers, would be eliminated in the \$23.8 billion budget, which also contains no new taxes.

RHODE ISLAND: House officials debated a \$3.6 billion budget Monday that would cut pensions for state employees and reinstate a minimum retirement age, as well as raise college tuition and lower local taxes. The budget approved by the Joint Finance Committee adds \$95 million to Governor Don Carcieri's plan.

WISCONSIN: The biggest issue is the University of Wisconsin's Systems Budget, which would see a decrease in the base budget but an increase in financial aid and faculty retention. Other than that, the budget is nearly complete, legislators say.

While these budgets are being hammered out, the four states with an October 1 fiscal year start can rest easier. Of these states, Texas and New York have adopted budgets, while Michigan and Alabama have not.

A state can also suffer a lower credit rating if they have to borrow to meet needs while a budget is worked out. California has repeatedly turned in budgets late and has one of the lowest credit scores of all the states partly as a result.

Fixing health care

Politicians unready to solve Medicaid, other problems

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, June 26, 2005

Republicans and Democrats in the state House are playing tit for tat over Medicaid, which accomplishes little but highlight the need for some fundamental fix in a health care system on life support.

Eventually, a remedy must come from Lansing, or more preferably Washington, but until that commitment is made expect the uninsured to suffer, businesses to struggle and lawmakers to pass off stunts as serious legislation.

Take the House GOP bloc, for example. It recently tried to cut 43,000 adults off Medicaid, the government-financed health care program for the poor. Republicans also want to raise and expand co-pays for this population, all in an attempt to balance the fiscal 2006 budget.

That action, however, was callous and disingenuous, because it's not as if these medical costs will disappear. Those without health insurance just obtain care free by going to hospital emergency rooms, which are obligated to treat all. That charity, totaling \$1.1 billion in 2003, is financed by patients who can pay, meaning those with health insurance provided by their employers, whose premiums are skyrocketing.

Though these realities apparently meant nothing in the House, the state Senate last week nullified the representatives' action, obviously knowing the difference between sincere problem-solving and blatant posturing.

And speaking of symbolic gestures, three House Democrats are making their own points on Medicaid with new legislation targeting businesses allegedly taking advantage of the government program. Their bill would force companies with more than 50 workers to pay a surcharge equal to what it costs the state to pay for Medicaid for their full-time employees.

While the Democrats raise an interesting issue - and back up their assertions with a report showing 55 businesses taking particular advantage of Medicaid - their medicine would be impossible to administer fairly. Though some companies could afford health care coverage, not all are financially able. And what would prevent those with the means from simply cutting work forces below the 50-employee threshold?

Make no mistake, the country's health care system is deeply troubled, with 45 million people uncovered, yet the system costs too much. Administration may account for up to 30 percent of the tab. In Michigan, a million people are without insurance, though 80 percent of them work. Additionally, 1.4 million get

Medicaid, which doesn't begin to cover doctor and hospital costs. That's one-fourth of the state's population subsidized by the well-insured, which requires inflationary pricing and other cleverness to keep the system afloat. Those dealing with this crisis have pleaded for Lansing and Washington to get involved - to provide money, yes, but more importantly to rationalize how we pay for medical care. Sadly, the lack of attention in both capitals indicates the problem is either too big for the politicians to solve, or they don't feel the urgency. One shudders at how bad it must get before they do.

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More doctors saying no to Medicaid

Monday, June 27, 2005

By Dominic Adams Times Writer

Dr. Robert Hafford no longer accepts new patients who have Medicaid for health insurance.

And he has a good reason.

"They're all different, whether it's state-run or county-run," he said of the 29 programs under the government-funded health insurance for impoverished and disabled people. "There's so many different kinds, that's what makes me crazy." That's not all: Medical professionals complain that reimbursement time is slow and, when it comes, it doesn't cover the true costs of services.

A recent survey by the Michigan State Medical Society, which represents more than 14,000 physicians, said 65 percent of its doctors accept Medicaid patients. The figure is down from 88 percent in 1999.

And the decrease isn't because of a lack of demand for doctors accepting Medicaid.

Medicaid is a federal-state health insurance program for the needy, aged, blind and disabled, and for low-income families with children.

There were 9,000 new applicants for Medicaid programs during the past year in Bay County, state human services officials said. Approximately 5,500 of those were approved. Statewide, there are 1.45 million Medicaid patients.

Hafford accepts HealthPlus forms of Medicaid. However, he only accepts such insurance if a current patient transfers to it.

He has a practice in the Medical Building at 700 Borton Ave. in Essexville and also lends his time to the Helen M. Nickless Volunteer Clinic. He said accepting new Medicaid patients is just too much trouble for his staff.

Patricia Padilla, his office manager, agrees.

"(The government is) slow-paying and sometimes you only get half of it back," she said. "If you had to survive on that, you couldn't."

Dr. Mark Komorowski is the president of the Bay County Medical Society and chairman of the legislation committee for the Michigan State Medical Society.

A plastic surgeon, Komorowski said he sees between 75 and 100 Medicaid patients annually, and most are when he is on call for the Bay Regional Medical Center's emergency room.

More physicians are turning down Medicaid patients because of the reimbursement turnaround time. Doctors often are forced to pay out of their own pocket when the government refund comes up short, Komorowski said.

"If your day's list is filled up with Medicaid patients, you're not going to have enough to cover your overhead," Komorowski said. "In a business model, it just doesn't work."

The Michigan Department of Human Services estimates there are around 10,500 Medicaid cases open in Bay County.

For the last two years, David Thane of Bay City has been on Bay Health Plan A, a form of Medicaid. Before he was covered by Blue Cross/Blue Shield, which was the medical insurance his wife's work provided.

When she was injured and could no longer work, the two were bumped from the plan.

The transition has been difficult for the couple because they are now limited in what care they are eligible for.

"It affects us because we can't go see the doctors we'd like to see," Thane said.

"Any referrals we get, sometimes we can't go see them because we don't have good insurance."

Dr. Bud Stevens is director at the Family and Child Health Clinic, 1480 W.

Center Road, and also is the volunteer director at the Helen M. Nickless

Volunteer Clinic. Before taking over his current positions, Stevens was in private practice for 32 years.

Stevens said he understands both sides of the argument.

"I always accepted Medicaid. I didn't ask, I just saw people when they came in,"

Stevens said. "Medicaid has never come close to covering the cost for a visit, so others have had to cover the cost."

- The Times Lansing Bureau and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

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U.S. Report Faults States' Medicaid Tactics

By ROBERT PEAR

Published: June 28, 2005

The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 27 - Two-thirds of the states use consultants to help them get more federal Medicaid money, often by using "questionable billing practices," and then reward those consultants by giving them a share of the money as a contingency fee, Congressional investigators said on Monday.

These consultants are driving up Medicaid costs by recommending financial tactics that violate federal law or policy, the investigators, from the Government Accountability Office, said in a report to Congress.

Kathryn G. Allen, director of health care issues at the auditing agency, said: "A growing number of states are using consultants on a contingency-fee basis to maximize federal Medicaid reimbursements. As of 2004, 34 states - up from 10 states in 2002 - used contingency-fee consultants for this purpose."

In some cases, Ms. Allen said, states have exploited federal Medicaid rules to obtain more federal money without increasing state contributions to the program, which provides health insurance for more than 50 million low-income people.

But Ms. Allen said the federal government also bore some responsibility. "A lack of oversight and clear guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has allowed states to develop new financing methods that generate additional federal costs," she said.

Senator Charles E. Grassley, the Iowa Republican who is chairman of the Finance Committee and who requested the study, said: "It's alarming to find that a majority of states use contingency-fee consultants to increase the federal dollars they claim from Medicaid, and that those increases are often achieved through schemes of questionable legality."

Mr. Grassley said that Congress and federal Medicaid officials had "an obligation to establish clear-cut ground rules and make sure they're followed." The accountability office said that federal officials did not routinely review the states' use of contingency-fee consultants.

Dr. Mark B. McClellan, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said his agency "does not have the authority to require states to disclose their use of contingency-fee consultants."

The federal government and the states share the cost of Medicaid, with the federal contribution ranging from 77 percent in Mississippi to 50 percent in higher-income states like New York.

"The Medicaid program," Dr. McClellan said, "is unquestionably paying for things that it should not be paying for." But he added that the White House had taken steps to improve the financial management of the program and had persuaded at least 23 states to halt some practices that improperly shifted Medicaid costs to the federal government.

When states hire consultants - generally private companies that specialize in helping the states maximize their federal reimbursements - they often receive a big return on their investment.

The Government Accountability Office said that a consultant helped Georgia obtain \$1.5 billion of additional federal Medicaid money from 2000 to 2004, in return for contingency fees of \$82 million. Massachusetts increased its federal Medicaid revenue by nearly \$570 million with help from consultants who were paid \$11 million, the report said.

William C. Copeland, a consultant for Georgia, said states hired Medicaid consultants because "the program is large, complex and incoherent, and most states cannot afford to hire all the full-time experts they need to unravel the complexities."

Federal guidelines, issued by the White House Office of Management and Budget, generally prohibit states from charging the federal government for contingency fees paid to contractors for securing federal money. Neither Georgia nor Massachusetts claimed federal reimbursement for such fees.

But the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services found that Colorado had received \$179,267 and Virginia \$338,982 for fees improperly billed to the federal Medicaid program. Officials in Colorado said they had been unaware of the federal prohibition.

Ronald P. Preston, the secretary of health and human services in Massachusetts, said contingency-fee contracts were a legitimate way to obtain federal aid for people in need.

But the accountability office said that federal officials, instead of issuing uniform national standards, had treated states differently, allowing Georgia and Massachusetts to use techniques forbidden to Maryland, Illinois and Texas. Federal policy is often set through negotiation with individual states, and federal Medicaid officials have become stricter in recent years as they try to curtail what they see as abusive practices.

The Detroit News
Tuesday, June 28, 200

Some drug coverage uncertain Low-income people and seniors with certain prescriptions may face tough choices ahead

By Kevin Freking / Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- When the federal government's new prescription drug benefit kicks in next year, it will not cover a category of drugs commonly used to treat anxiety, insomnia and seizures.

That means those disabled and elderly people on Medicare who take Xanax, Valium, Ativan and other types of the drug benzodiazepine will have to look elsewhere for coverage or switch to a different, less addictive medication. Finding other alternatives may not be easy for the 1.7 million low-income, elderly people who take the drug and will be automatically enrolled in the new prescription drug plan. They will depend on the states to continue paying for their benzodiazepines -- "benzos" for short -- on Jan. 1, but with no guarantee. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently urged state Medicaid directors to provide coverage of the drugs for the 6.3 million people who are "dual eligible" for prescription aid under the Medicaid and Medicare programs. If states agree, they will continue to get federal matching funds when they pay for benzos.

But concerns remain among medical professionals and advocates for the elderly about what would happen if some states opt to save money by excluding benzos from their Medicaid program for the poor.

"Stopping the therapy abruptly can lead to seizures and dangerous, life-threatening problems," said Thomas Clark, policy director for the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists.

The American Medical Association took note of those risks when it passed a resolution Tuesday pledging to "work to end the exclusion of medications of the benzodiazepine class from (federal) reimbursement."

When Congress approved the Medicare Modernization Act two years ago, it specifically excluded several categories of drugs, including drugs to promote weight loss, fertility or agents for cosmetic purposes, as well as benzos.

Basically, Congress excluded from the new benefit all drugs that states were entitled to omit from their Medicaid program. All states provide some level of coverage for benzos, even though they don't have to. Last year, they spent \$57 million on that category of drugs for the dual-eligible population.

Elderly people who don't qualify for Medicaid will have to pay for the drugs on their own as they do now, find a replacement that is part of the new Medicare benefit or pay higher premiums for additional prescription coverage.

In 2004, the entire benzodiazepine class accounted for about \$702.8 million in sales in the United States, according to IMS Health, a leading consultant to pharmaceutical companies.

The Medicare Rights Center, an advocacy group, is asking Congress to amend the act to provide coverage or for Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt to intervene administratively. Aides to Leavitt say he lacks the authority to do that. The group said the exclusion could be harmful for patients if it resulted in "rapid, unphased medication changes."

The drugs are not without controversy. Because they are so addictive, they are usually unsuitable for long-term treatments. Most are included in the Beers' List, a guide that identifies medications that should be avoided by the elderly.

Dr. Donna Fick, of the Penn State University School of Nursing, helped update the Beers' List two years ago. "I would never say someone should never be on a certain class of drugs. That's up to a doctor who can see the whole picture, but I generally think they should be avoided in older adults."

What's at issue

BENEFIT OMITTED:

The federal government's new prescription drug benefit for Medicare recipients will not cover a category of drugs known as benzodiazepine, commonly used to treat anxiety, insomnia and seizures.

IMPACT: An estimated 1.7 million low-income disabled and elderly people on Medicare who take Xanax, Valium, Ativan and similar drugs will have to switch to different, less addictive medication if states do not agree to continue picking up the prescription costs under Medicaid.

CONCERN: Some medical professionals and advocates for the

low-income elderly
worry that cutting off
patients from the drugs
they depend upon can
cause serious health
complications.

Learn more

Read articles and watch
Webcasts by doctors on
the treatment of:

Anxiety

Insomnia

Seizures

Police rescue tot from heat in locked van

Mother may face charges of child abuse or neglect after incident at Westgate

BY AMALIE NASH
Tuesday, June 28, 2005
News Staff Reporter

The van's windows were rolled up and the sun was shining directly on the child, said Officer Dawn King, who responded with Officer Chris Foerg. The temperature at the time was 82 degrees, with a heat index of 87.

"We decided we couldn't wait for a wrecker to come unlock the van, so (Foerg) broke out a back window and I crawled in," King said this morning. "He was drenched with sweat. He was sleepy and wasn't waking up right away."

The 38-year-old mother was arrested after she heard the commotion and came outside, where emergency personnel were tending to her dehydrated son, police said.

A man called police around 10 a.m. to report a baby locked in a van for at least seven minutes in the parking lot of the shopping center at West Stadium Boulevard and Jackson Avenue. When officers arrived, the baby was in a car seat inside the van and appeared to be sleeping.

Paramedics from Huron Valley Ambulance were called to tend to the child, and he was taken to the University of Michigan Medical Center for mild dehydration, King said.

The mother, who did not speak English, was arrested when she came back to the van, about five minutes after officers arrived, Foerg said. Through an interpreter, she told police she did not think it would be a problem to leave the baby in the car for a short time, King said.

"Hopefully, she learned her lesson," King said. "At the hospital, the doctors really drove home to the father the point of what a deadly situation it can be. A baby can become comatose and quickly die in extreme heat."

The mother was released from police custody, and the case will be submitted to the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office to determine if the mother should face child abuse or neglect charges, police said. Child protective services workers also were notified.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6832.

Child Found In Mom's Hot Minivan Charges Could Be Filed In Case

POSTED: 10:11 am EDT June 28, 2005

A mother could face charges after her toddler was found in a minivan during Monday's heat in Ann Arbor.

Officer Describes Condition Of Toddler

Police said the mother locked her 1-year-old son in her van while she went shopping at Westgate Mall, located at Jackson and Stadium streets. A passerby noticed the child in the car at about 10 a.m., Local 4 reported.

The window was broken to rescue the child, Local 4 reported.

"We extracted the child from the vehicle. He was sweating profusely, and he was somewhat groggy," said Ann Arbor police Lt. Mike Logghe.

Logghe said the boy suffered from heat exhaustion. He was transported to the University of Michigan Hospital for treatment and was expected to recover.

The mother was questioned by police and released. The boy was released to his mother's care, Local 4 learned.

Officers will now send the case to the prosecutor's office for review of possible charges.

Temperatures reached above 90 degrees in most of southeastern Michigan Monday morning, according to the Local4Casters.

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Victim Approached While Walking To School

POSTED: 4:22 pm EDT June 27, 2005

UPDATED: 7:46 pm EDT June 27, 2005

A man accused in an abduction attempt on June 8 in Waterford remains on the loose.

A 14-year-old girl was walking to school at about 7:15 a.m. in the area of Scott Lake Road near Keely Court when the encounter with the stranger occurred, according to a Waterford police news release.

The teen told police that the man got out of a faded red Chevrolet S-10 or Ford Ranger pickup, approached her and grabbed her arm. She was able to pull away from the man and flee the scene, police said.

The man was described as black, 25 years old, 6 feet 1 inches tall, 200 pounds, with short hair and a thin manicured beard.

Police said a white man was seen sitting in the passenger seat of the pickup truck.

Anyone who can identify the man in the composite sketch (pictured, left) is asked to contact Waterford police at (248) 618-6098.

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Juvenile Crime

Court makes clear, parents pay, too

June 26, 2005

Detroit Free Press

Do you know what your children are up to? If it's no good, it may be very costly.

In a decision last week, the state Court of Appeals upheld a Michigan law that makes parents liable for the costs of crimes committed by their juvenile children. The ruling came on an appeal from the parents of a Livingston County youth who was 15 when he vandalized Howell High School and set fires inside the building in the spring of 2002. Repairs ran to \$715,581.49, which the parents were ordered to pay.

They said they were being punished for their status, not their conduct.

But in its first ruling on a challenge to the law, a three-judge appeals panel said, "the parent-child relationship provides a rational basis for imposing liability. ... The Legislature could have reasonably believed that subjecting parents to vicarious liability for their children's willful and malicious acts of vandalism would encourage parents to exercise their guiding role in the upbringing of children. Our concern is not whether that hope has been or will be fulfilled, but whether there is a rational basis for it."

The judges also said the damages should be reduced to compensation for losses sustained by the school, not repair costs incurred by the insurer, since the school was the victim of the incident. Still, parents should be advised that in Michigan, getting socked with the cost of a child's crime can make paying for college seem like a bargain.

Jun 28, 9:15 AM EDT

Groups Back Restraining Orders Amid Ruling

By JON SANCHE
Associated Press Write

DENVER (AP) -- Victims' advocates scrambled to reassure the public that restraining orders are still effective for preventing domestic violence, despite a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that police cannot be sued over the way they enforce them.

The 7-2 ruling Monday ended a lawsuit by a Colorado woman who claimed Castle Rock police did not do enough to prevent her estranged husband from killing their three young daughters. The ruling said Jessica Gonzales did not have a constitutional right to police enforcement of the court order against her husband. "The second tragedy in this case could very well be that victims of domestic violence will read this opinion to mean that protection orders are not worth the paper they're printed on, and that impression would be false," said Richard Smith, a Washington lawyer who filed a brief in support of Gonzales.

Trish Thibodo, executive director of the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said police still have a responsibility to enforce restraining orders and to take them seriously.

"Nothing's changed," she said.

City governments feared that a ruling in Gonzales' favor could open them to a flood of lawsuits. Judges in Colorado issued more than 14,000 restraining orders in fiscal 2004.

"The potential for liability was just completely out of this world," said Brad Bailey, an assistant city attorney in Littleton who filed a brief in support of the Castle Rock police department.

Gonzales' attorney, Brian Reichel, did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

On ABC's "Good Morning America," Gonzales said now that the Supreme Court has ruled, she is moving on.

"I'm going to continue my advocacy for other victims," she said. "I believe that there is a lot to be done, and this is a new beginning for me. And continuing to try to find some resolution for why my three children were murdered."

Gonzales sued the Castle Rock police department, claiming officers ignored her pleas to find her husband after he took the three girls, ages 10, 9 and 7, from the front yard of her home in June 1999 in violation of a restraining order. Hours later, Simon Gonzales died in a gunfight with officers outside a police station. The bodies of the girls were in his truck.

Gonzales argued that she was entitled to sue based on her rights under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and under a Colorado law that says officers must use "every reasonable means" to enforce a restraining order.

She contended that her restraining order should be considered property under the 14th Amendment and that it was taken from her without due process when police failed to enforce it.

A federal judge in Denver dismissed her lawsuit, but the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals revived it, saying the restraining order was a government benefit that should be treated like any other property.

But Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the high court's majority, said Colorado's law does not entitle people who receive protective orders to police enforcement. Smith, Gonzales' attorney, called the ruling "an open invitation to states to look at their statutes and enhance them and to provide the kind of protections that victims need."

He said lawmakers should ensure that police departments can be sued in state courts for failure to enforce protective orders. Under current state law, governments in Colorado and other states are immune from such lawsuits, forcing Gonzales to turn to the federal courts.

"The ultimate conclusion in this case is that states need to stand up and become accountable in protecting the innocent victims of domestic violence," Smith said. Castle Rock officials contend they tried to help Gonzales. Police twice went to the estranged husband's apartment, kept an eye out for his truck and called his cellular phone and home phone.

Gonzales reached him on his cell phone, and he told her that he had taken the girls to an amusement park in nearby Denver. Gonzales maintains that police should have gone to the amusement park or contacted Denver police.

"We all still feel really bad about this whole situation, but in response to the allegations we were unresponsive and so on, these were all totally not true," said Police Chief Tony Lane, who was chief at the time of the slayings.

"The deaths of these girls, while tragic, I think the learning experience we gained from this will help us deal better with these situations in the future," he said.

Habitat for Humanity joins building blitz

Mary Feldhusen - mfeldhusen@dailypress.net

June 28, 2005

ESCANABA - Bay de Noc Habitat for Humanity and Habitat affiliates throughout the state were on a mission last week. Their goal was to build more than 200 homes during the Jimmy Carter Work Project in Michigan.

"It's kind of a week-long blitz," said John Kositzky, Bay de Noc's executive director. "Two hundred thirty homes are being built in the state and dedicated Friday."

Bay de Noc's house is being built at 2620 7th Place in Escanaba. Pastor Art Kievit of Agape Ministries officiated at Friday morning's dedication.

Jimmy Carter Work Projects are held once a year all over the world, Kositzky said. This is the first time the project has come to Michigan.

Benton Harbor and Detroit were host sites for the annual home-building project run by Habitat for Humanity International.

Former President Carter, 80, has been a supporter of the projects over the past 20 years. He and his wife, Rosalynn, were at building sites in Benton Harbor Monday and Tuesday and then worked in Detroit where more homes were going up.

"He brings a lot of sponsors and endorsements with him. We're very, very glad that we got him in Michigan this year," said Kositzky. "Rumors are flying that next year may be his last."

Participating in the Carter Project is a great way for the local Habitat to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Kositzky said.

Bay de Noc officials and volunteers built their first Habitat house in Delta County in 1995. Since then, the organization has built 54 homes.

"We build elaborate houses compared to what they build in foreign countries," Kositzky said.

"They build mud huts - 100 in seven days. We hope to build two homes this year."

Habitat's home-building program is designed to give families a leg up.

"Unfortunately, sometimes people think it's a handout and it's not," Kositzky said. "It's a great program, but they have to work at it."

One out of every five families doesn't make it through the program because they have trouble partnering with Habitat on the house construction.

"They have to make the commitment," he said.

Eligible families have to put in 250 hours of "sweat equity" per adult and enlist their friends to put in 75 hours of sweat equity per adult.

A child is waiting

James, 11, likes writing, baseball, cartoons

BY ROSEMARY DORR
Special to The Detroit News

Looking happy, James reports he graduated into the sixth grade. "It's a good feeling," he says.

The 11-year-old is a friendly boy who enjoys being helpful and has only one dislike. "I don't like squash," James says.

He likes to play outdoors, skate, watch cartoons ("all of them") and play baseball (his "biggest wish"), and he keeps trying to do his best.

"Everybody loves James," says his therapist at the residence where he has lived for about two years. "He gets along with peers

and staff, is very good at following directions, knows what to do and does it. He's excellent in school (where he's in a special education classroom for children with learning disabilities). His teachers say he has come a long way in reading and is very creative in writing stories. James does all his homework and even likes to help other boys with theirs."

Shy and quiet, until he knows people, James beams at the praise.

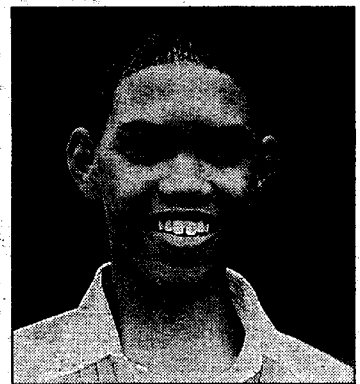
"He's a great kid," says his adoption worker. "Although he needs help in school and one-on-one attention, he presents no (be-

havior) problems. He should keep in contact with his younger brother, also in foster care."

Might you consider becoming the loving, patient and committed family James needs? Please talk with Kelli Crawford at Orchards Children's Services, (248) 593-2196.

Last column's child: Tony, 8, energetic, "sweet and adorable," responds to attention and structure. For information, call Kyana Houston at Judson Center, (313) 794-5653, ext. 282.

A child is waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.



Liz Orozco / The Detroit News

James, 11, is a polite and friendly, sports-loving boy who responds to attention.

Jun 28, 12:33 AM EDT

Federal grant to fund census of Michigan farm workers

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) -- A \$30,000 federal grant will fund a census of the state's farm workers, which should enable social-services agencies to provide them and their families with better help.

An estimated 45,000 to 125,000 farm workers come to Michigan every year to harvest the state's crops of strawberries, asparagus, blueberries, apples and other produce. The grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will give the agencies more precise figures to aid in their planning.

Martha Gonzalez-Cortes, chairwoman of the Interagency Migrant Services Committee, which coordinates the delivery of services for migrant and seasonal farm laborers, said agencies believe more migrants are staying in Michigan after they arrive - but no one knows for sure.

"It's almost impossible to plan your building and services deliveries if you don't know how many people you have month to month, or if you're spending your resources wisely," she told The Grand Rapids Press for a story published Monday.

Gonzalez-Cortes, a former farm worker, said when her family started making its way to Michigan from Florida and Texas in the 1970s, seasonal workers stayed here for about three months, leaving in September. More now are choosing to stay longer, she said.

"It seems that the industry has changed and farm workers are staying a more extended period of time," Gonzalez-Cortes said. "And we're still operating under the presumption that they stay for three months at a time, so our efforts don't really match up at this point in time."

Many migrants are finding jobs at nurseries, one of Michigan's fastest-growing areas of agriculture.

Every February, Ruben Garcia leaves his house in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, to labor as a seasonal worker at Zelenka Nursery in Ottawa County. The work keeps him employed most of the year.

"It's nice here. There's always a lot of work," said Garcia, 53, who spends his days weeding plants and loading them into trucks for delivery to stores.

After helping out with Christmas trees in November, he will head to Texas, where he will visit friends before returning home in time for Christmas.

Javier Sandoval, 32, who lives in Florida most of the year, said he would like to stay in Michigan a little longer. Finding a job at a nursery would help, he said.

Sandoval spent a recent morning harvesting strawberries and the afternoon preparing plants for next year's season at a farm in Kent County.

"I'll work in whatever I can," he said.

Information from: The Grand Rapids Press,
<http://www.mlive.com/grpress>

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Need for migrant services declines as numbers dwindle

By HILLARY WHITCOMB JESSE
Times Herald

WATERTOWN TWP.- Chris Collins' presence this summer is making people relieved and happy.

Collins, a teacher at Reese schools in Tuscola County during the school year, is the migrant program specialist for the Sanilac County Department of Human Services. But it isn't a crowd of migrant farm workers who are thrilled to see him - it's his coworkers.

The drop in the migrant farm-worker population in Sanilac County, from the heyday of hundreds down to a few families today, means Collins has picked up work for other caseworkers in the office.

As far as migrant casework goes, "As of this point, I have two families," he said earlier this month. "This time last year, I probably had half a dozen. We provide help with food benefits, medical benefits, and we also provide help with child day care."

He's expecting a small rush of new clients around the start of July, after kids finish school down South and their families come North.

Collins' supervisor, payments manager Nancy Albert, said there seems to be less need for migrant workers than in the past.

She has worked in the human-services office since 1971 and remembers the mid-1980s to the early 1990s as a busier time for migrant farm workers in Sanilac County.

Back then, it took two migrant specialists plus the other office workers pitching in to handle the workload, she said.

Albert found a report from 1995 that showed 54 migrant farm worker families, including 183 individuals, received help that year. She said the need probably topped out around 100 families during the busiest years, but reports weren't available.

During that same time, a nonprofit agency called the Migrant Ministry, Health Inc. served migrant workers in Lapeer, St. Clair and Sanilac counties.

Founded by Isabelle Sanchez in the late 1960s, the agency used donations from churches and other sources to provide medical, housing, educational or employment help to migrant workers.

After Sanchez died in 1991, the ministry's leadership changed hands a few times and was renamed Thumb Outreach Minority Services in the late 1990s.

John Espinoza, today a Democratic state representative from Croswell, was one of its leaders before the agency's funding dried up. He said the Human Development Commission in Caro took over the agency's function, though funding for such needs has dropped significantly.

"The need has decreased also. There just isn't the population," he said.

Originally published June 27, 2005

**Migrant families put down new roots
Laborers trade life on road for jobs,
stability**

By HILLARY WHITCOMB JESSE
Times Herald

Cooking dinner in her apartment in downtown Capac, Marta Villegas isn't far from the La Mexicana market, a place that made her move to Michigan a little easier.

Villegas and her husband, Jesus Sancen, moved to Michigan from a little town near Guanajuato, Mexico, five years ago.

Villegas only speaks Spanish and said going shopping is one of the easiest things for her to do in Capac and Imlay City because there are plenty of Mexican stores where people speak her language.

Villegas, Sancen and their two children, Jesus and Rubi, are one of the more recent families to settle out of the migrant lifestyle and sink roots into the area.

Others have been here longer and found ways

to make their homes here.

Marta's family

Villegas said her husband first came to Michigan six years ago as a migrant farm worker. The next year, she and little Jesus, then about 3 years old, came with him. They've lived in Capac ever since.

"Work was good. There in Mexico, there isn't a lot of work. They don't have factories or anything," Villegas said. "Life is better than in Mexico, because here, they have work."

She spent two May-to-April seasons working at the Vlastic Foods plant in Imlay City when they first arrived but now is home with her children. Sancen is a farm worker; this past week, Villegas said, he was cutting lettuce on a farm near Romeo.

"In Mexico, we'd be very poor," she said.

The other reason they came here was so the kids could go to school, she said.

"In Mexico, school costs a lot of money. And here, they (schools) don't cost money."

Jesus, 8, goes to Capac Elementary School and said English is easier for him to speak than Spanish. Rubi, 2, may start preschool this fall, her mother said.

Moving to another country took a 15-day trip and some emotional rough spots, Villegas said.

"It's difficult because we're not with our family. We're alone. It's very far, here," she said.

Tillie's family

For Tillie Ramos, 54, of Croswell, the days of being part of the migrant lifestyle are long gone, but she still remembers them.

Her parents came to Deckerville as part of the summer work rotation, stayed for a while, then headed south to Ohio to pick tomatoes, where a young Ramos would start the school year. She said the school bus would pull up to the laborers' housing camp and wait for her to get on as all the other kids watched. Then, when she got to school, she wouldn't want to talk because of her accent.

"I tell my kids, 'I remember going to school and not being able to go out for recess because

we were behind," Ramos said.

She has three grown sons and three grandchildren now. She has worked in the Croswell-Lexington School District for 21 years.

In the early 1960s, her parents decided to settle in Applegate, and she started attending school there.

"When we settled, Dad got a job at a factory here in Croswell," Ramos said.

She graduated from Croswell-Lexington High School in 1970 and since has worked as a bilingual aide and classroom aide as well as running the now-defunct summer migrant program.

"I could always relate to the kids who came in, who were so shy. I could see myself in them," she said.

The highlight of that work, she said, was hearing kids say they were determined to continue their education despite the difficulties of interrupted schooling and tight family finances.

"That was the greatest thing," Ramos said.

Contact Hillary Whitcomb Jesse at (810) 989-6277 or hjesse@gannett.com.

Originally published June 28, 2005

As seniors sweat it out, advocates for elderly work to keep them out of danger

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

By Ted Roelofs
The Grand Rapids Press

With no air conditioning in her third-floor apartment, Rachel Davis does her best to endure the stifling temperatures.

"I survive on my fans," says Davis, 73, sitting in her living room at Grandview Apartments on the West Side of Grand Rapids.

"Of course, it's not making the air any cooler. It's just moving the hot air around."

One fan in the living room, one in her bedroom and a new ceiling fan worked for her as the mercury reached 93 degrees Monday. Davis generally sits in the dark to keep it as cool as possible. She cooks as little as she can.

Still, Davis says she doesn't have much to complain about.

"There's a lot of people in worse situations than me. I have a roof over my head and food to eat."

With the heat wave expected to continue for a couple of more days, senior citizen advocates are scrambling to make sure no one is endangered by the soaring temperatures. Killer heat waves in other cities -- such as Chicago, in 1995, which recorded nearly 500 heat-related deaths -- are a grim reminder that the elderly are most susceptible to heat stroke.

"It really can be dangerous," said Robert Barnes, executive director of Senior Neighbors Inc., which provides senior services throughout Kent County.

"Some of the medications that seniors take make the body less able to deal with the heat. Some seniors worry about security and are reluctant to open windows," Barnes said.

Barnes said his agency has given out about 50 fans in recent days, all but tapping out a \$1,000 fund. He said the agency took 42 more requests Monday for fans they won't be able to fill without more funds.

"We need donations," Barnes said.

Forecasters expect temperatures to remain in the high 80s today and Wednesday, before cooling off to the mid-70s on Friday. The average temperature for the month is on track to tie June 1923 for the fifth-highest on record.

Experts say that kind of heat makes isolated, home-bound seniors the most vulnerable within a vulnerable group because they have virtually no one to check on them.

For some, Meals on Wheels drivers are their only daily contact with the outside world.

Mary Vargas, program manager, said her drivers are alert for anyone who is having difficulty handling the heat.

"If anything is out of the ordinary, or if somebody is not answering the door, they let me know."

Wyoming resident Dorothy Wimby, 62, remembers what it was like in her last apartment, near downtown Grand Rapids.

"The place I just moved from did not have air conditioning. It was a second-floor apartment, and it was super hot and humid.

She now lives in an apartment complex with air conditioning for the first time.

"Consumers Power is getting a big bunch of money, but I am so grateful for it, yes I am," Wimby said.

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IN BRIEF

Monday, June 27, 2005

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan is looking for families and individuals who can provide a loving home for children in foster care. Interested people are invited to attend one of two informational meetings at 10 a.m. or 6 p.m. Tuesday at the LSS office in the Commonwealth Commerce Center, 209 E. Washington St.

If yours is a two-parent family, both parents must attend. Registration is helpful but not required; call 789-6444 or (800) 786-0541.

Right to Life plans baby contest

The Precious Baby Contest will once again be sponsored by Jackson Right to Life at the Jackson County Fair, coming Aug 7-13.

If you want to enter your favorite baby -- currently 24 months or younger - - mail a photo to Jackson Right to Life, P.O. Box 683, Jackson, MI 49204.

It must be postmarked by July 30.

Photos also may be dropped off by that date at the Right to Life office, 317 W. Washington Ave., during office hours.

In the contest, fair visitors vote for their favorite picture by putting money in a jar.

Winners receive gift certificates from Toys R Us.

For more information, call Right to Life at 784-1300.

Staff reports

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Young women get fresh start

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

By Pat Shellenbarger

The Grand Rapids Press

Latrice Whiteside and Rose Gibbs had few choices. None, really.

Both had been taken from their families by court order, Whiteside placed in foster care, Gibbs in a school for delinquent girls. When they turned 18 recently, they no longer were eligible for the state-supported programs, but neither were they ready to live as independent adults.

"Some people think they're ready to go out on their own," Gibbs said, "and they're not."

She knows she isn't.

So in May, when Lutheran Social Services of Michigan opened a Grand Rapids home for young women too old for foster care but lacking the skills to live on their own, Gibbs was the first to move in. In mid June, Whiteside became the second. Today, Lutheran Social Services will dedicate the home.

The renovated Cape Cod-style house on Grand Rapids' Southeast Side is part of a program Lutheran Social Services started called Youth Independent Living Services.

"They turn 18, they graduate from high school, they could be just basically out on their own," said Laura Mitchell, director of the nonprofit agency's services for children and families in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. "They're going to end up homeless on the street or possibly in jail."

Under the program, some who have outgrown foster care are placed with host families. But for some, living with a host family is too much like living in foster care, so in May, Lutheran Social Services opened the house in southeast Grand Rapids.

"I'm not good with other peoples' families trying to be my family," Gibbs said.

The home, renovated by volunteers from seven Lutheran churches, is called Independence Place.

"We call it 'home,'" said Krystle Hoover, a 19-year-old Grand Valley State University student hired as house monitor.

The three young women share household chores. Once a week, caseworker Joan Lutke meets with Whiteside and Gibbs, teaching them such basic adult skills as budgeting, shopping and balancing a checkbook.

"Sitting down every day and watching TV will only get you so far," Gibbs said. "You have to get a job. You have to know what you want to do. They make you realize that."

She wants to study business and culinary arts at Grand Rapids Community College and eventually open a restaurant. Whiteside's goals: "Finish high school, get a car, get my own apartment by my family."

The girls receive \$550 a month from the state to cover living expenses, including rent. Each is required to find a job, attend school if not yet graduated and comply with other house rules.

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MERIT AWARD: Community service requirement worth reinstating

June 27, 2005

Detroit Free Press Editorial

State legislators ought to make every effort to rescue the idea of tying community service to the Michigan Merit Award scholarship. Public service holds great potential to benefit communities across the state and to enhance the life experience of the young people who participate.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm adopted community service as part of her overhaul of the Merit scholarship program. The plan was to have high school students commit to 40 hours of community service starting with the class of 2006 to get the \$2,500 scholarship if they stay in state, or \$1,000 if they go to school outside Michigan.

But Attorney General Mike Cox has rightly pointed out that the idea was approved through improper channels. Last August, the state's Merit board adopted a resolution making service a qualification for the award. That resolution stretched beyond the board's authority, which is focused on academic achievement goals.

Cox was doing his job to measure the letter of the law. The addition of community service requires legislative approval, something Lansing ought to submit.

This isn't, as some critics suggest, about making young people jump through needless hoops in order to receive the scholarship. Community service is about teaching young people to care more about the cities and towns they call home, a value lawmakers ought to enthusiastically endorse. Many school districts already have programs that students could easily join to meet this worthy goal.

All the idea really needs now are lawmakers willing to resuscitate it. The mostly Republican dominated Legislature should not see this as a sop to Democrat Granholm, which would surely kill it, but rather a commitment to the state's well-being and to good citizenship.

Lansing should teach scholarship seekers a simple lesson: Sometimes you have to give a little to get a little.

Merit award

State shouldn't force students to 'volunteer' for scholarship

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, June 27, 2005

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox struck a blow for sound reason in his ruling against packing a community service requirement into the Michigan Merit Award scholarship. Lawmakers should take heed and not to be tempted to engraft such a vague and unworkable stipulation into law. With highest regard for the value of "volunteerism" for people of all ages, a mandatory 40 hours for teenagers preparing for college is neither wise nor workable, despite Gov. Jennifer Granholm's promotion of it during the past year.

The state's Merit Award Board was listening though: It ordered proof of 40 hours of community service as necessary for one of the \$2,500 scholarships toward attendance at a Michigan college, funded by the state's settlement in a lawsuit against tobacco companies for causing health risks.

The change would have taken effect for the Class of 2006, had Cox not squelched it. Now lawmakers are flirting with the notion of imposing the community service requirement on the Class of 2007.

Cox confined his comments to academic achievement as the underpinning of the Merit Award. He said the board had no legal right to add extraneous regulations. But arguments against the community service requirement go beyond what should be legally permissible.

First is the plight of teenagers, who if they set out to earn one of the scholarships must make studying a top priority. Many must hold down jobs on the side as well to afford college, Merit Awards notwithstanding. Many depend on their parents, or family cars, to get about. If there is still time for service, splendid. But tying a state scholarship to proof of it could be an unfair burden.

Then there is the notion of record-keeping, which could be easily manipulated. School officials are expected to document the experience and presumably would be honest. But they nearly always would have to take the word of others - clergy, directors of charities, neighbors, or whoever is willing to attest for the 40 hours.

Despite those blatant weaknesses, Granholm gets credit for trying to inspire the state's youth to volunteer their time and talent early in life. She just needs to keep "volunteer" as the controlling principle.

Detroit preschool spaces to be cut

June 27, 2005

BY CHASTITY PRATT
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Fewer parents will be able to enroll their children in Detroit Public Schools preschool classes next fall.

Budget cuts will leave the district with 629 fewer spaces in the federally funded Head Start program for low-income children and there will be 656 fewer spaces in the Michigan School Readiness Program next school year, according to DPS projections.

Federal and state funds pay for half-day programs and Detroit Public Schools has funded the balance for full-day programs, which most Detroit parents want. But, the district can no longer make up the difference and must cut the spaces, officials said.

The cuts are expected to save about \$5 million, leaving about 3,650 preschool spaces. The district has tried to fight enrollment declines since 2001 by expanding preschool classes, drawing in more than 1,000 additional students.

Now the district is giving up more than a quarter of its preschool slots while trying to avoid a \$200-million deficit. Many of the preschool classes being cut were located at the 32 school buildings that will be closed in the fall.

"We don't believe we're going to have enough spaces for 3-year-olds," said Toni Hartke, program supervisor for the district's Office of Early Childhood Education, adding that most 4-year-olds should get into a class.

Low-income parents have an alternative -- they can try to enroll their children at one of seven other Head Start programs in the city, school and city officials said.

More than 70% of Detroit students qualify as low-income. The cuts come as students statewide are improving at a faster pace on most MEAP standardized tests than Detroit students.

National studies show that a key to helping low-income students shrink the achievement gap is early childhood education.

"I've learned how to teach them to read, something I didn't expect, something that I thought they were too young for," said Elaine Shifman, who taught preschool at Stewart Elementary, a high-performing elementary school that will be closed for good in the fall. "That's the most critical thing that should not be cut."

The city's **Department of Human Services** is in trouble, too. It funnels the funds, about \$50 million, to the city's Head Start programs, including the school district.

In October, the regional office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services questioned whether the city had passed along federal government-funded raises to city Head Start employees over the past 12 years.

An on-site review in March by the Administration for Children and Families led the city's Head Start program to be labeled as "deficient" in financial management, according to a March letter from HHS.

Dwayne Haywood, executive director for the city's Department of Human Services, said that the city filed a Quality Improvement Plan this month, a requirement after the government probe. He said the raises are hard to track because five years of pay records could not be located. The unions will have to help figure out which, if any, employees are owed money, he said.

"We have put together the corrective actions that are needed and sent it to the feds," Haywood said. "It's not to the point where they're going to show up tomorrow and say, 'We're taking \$50 million from the city of Detroit.' "

The city has up to 1 year to correct problems or face losing funding.

For information on Head Start availability, contact Detroit Public Schools at 313-866-0533 or Detroit Human Services at 313-852-5621

Contact CHASTITY PRATT at 313-223-4537 or pratt@freepress.com.

Published June 28, 2005

Michigan Works hunts for new site Lansing clients of jobs agency going elsewhere

By Nicole Jacques
Lansing State Journal

Capital Area Michigan Works scrambled Monday to find a temporary location after the roof at its headquarters collapsed Saturday.

After relying on cell phones and public library computers for much of the day, officials said they won't be able to serve clients in Lansing for at least another day. They advised residents looking for job placement and training services to call branch offices in St. Johns and Charlotte, which both saw spikes in requests for help Monday.

Engineers with Eyde Co., the building's owner, determined it would be safe to remove computers and other equipment from the two wings still standing. The unstable center section where the roof caved in was demolished Saturday to make the site safer.

City inspectors still must give the OK to enter the building to salvage equipment, said Mark Clouse, an attorney for Eyde.

The most urgent need is to find a place where unemployed people can verify they are looking for work - a requirement for benefits, said agency Chief Executive Officer Doug Stites.

The closure has displaced about 80 staff members and the more than 500 people who visit the center daily for employment assistance.

"We're working on it methodically," Stites said. "At least nobody got hurt."

Officials worked out of a makeshift office Monday in the former Walter French Academy building next door, another Eyde property that could be tapped as a temporary home. The agency also could decide to use more than one short-term site, spokeswoman Kate Tycocki said.

City and company officials don't know what caused the collapse of the four-year-old building.

Contact Nicole Jacques at 377-1066 or njacques@lsj.com.

• For more information about Capital Area Michigan Works, including updates on the Cedar Street office closure, visit www.camw.org. For information about Michigan Works service centers statewide, visit

www.michiganworks.org.

If you need help

- Anyone with questions about Capital Area Michigan Works services should contact the Charlotte office, 311 W. First St., (517) 543-5278, or the St. Johns office, 101 W. Cass St., (800) 285-WORKS or (989) 224-2000.

Black kids more likely to be born premature, report says

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Black children are more likely to be born too soon, too small and with little or no prenatal care than white or Hispanic babies, according to a new report.

Eight percent of pregnant black women received late or no care before having their babies between 2001 and 2003 while the rate was 2 percent among white women and 5 percent among Hispanic women.

When they were born, 14 percent of black children weighed less than normal, more than double the rate among white children and Hispanic children.

Online

Michigan
League for
Human
Services:
www.milhs.org

The "Right Start in Michigan" report — scheduled to be released today by the Lansing-based advocacy group, Michigan League for Human Services — used birth certificate records from 1994-96 and 2001-03 to assess the risks of mothers and their newborns according to race, ethnicity and hometown.

The report is intended to emphasize the need for aid and programs for poor pregnant women.

"The circumstances and conditions under which a baby is born have lifelong implications," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services.

Six percent of Hispanic women in Michigan smoked during their pregnancy, less than the 16 percent rate for whites and the 14 percent rate for blacks, the report said.

The rate of babies born early — at least three weeks shy of a normal 40-week pregnancy — was highest among blacks. Nearly 17 percent of black babies were born early, while the rate was 10 percent among whites and nearly 11 percent among Hispanics.

Michigan's infant mortality rate ranked 38th in the nation, according to 2001 data.

Unger prelim to proceed

Defense again seeks dismissal

By PATRICK SULLIVAN

Record-Eagle staff writer

BEULAH - Mark Unger's preliminary hearing on charges he murdered his wife at a Benzie County resort will resume almost a year after it began.

The hearing that started last July is scheduled to continue here Monday in 85th District Court. No witnesses are expected to testify. The prosecution called its last witness in the on-again, off-again hearing in December.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison said he plans to call no one to the stand. Instead, he hopes to argue a motion asking Judge Brent Danielson to reconsider an earlier ruling rejecting a motion to dismiss the case.

Unger, of Huntington Woods, is accused of killing his wife, Florence Unger, during a weekend stay with their children at Watervale resort in October 2003.

In the new motion, Harrison argues that Danielson erred when he rejected an earlier motion to dismiss, saying the prosecution's evidence showed probable cause that Unger committed premeditated murder.

The prosecution's case for first-degree murder suffered a blow when Danielson barred testimony of Oakland County medical examiner Dr. L. J. Dragovic, who determined that Unger drowned. Other testimony in the case indicated Unger died of head trauma. The prosecution is being handled by the state attorney general's office.

Harrison cited arguments from assistant attorney general Mark Bilkovic, who admitted in court that Danielson's decision to bar Dragovic's testimony dimmed prospects of a conviction on first-degree murder, which requires proof of premeditation.

Investigators believe Florence Unger, 37, fell or was pushed from a boathouse roof to a concrete apron 12 feet below and was dragged into the shallow edge of Lower Herring Lake.

If Florence Unger drowned, that would prove premeditation because it would mean somebody dragged her alive into Lower Herring Lake after she fell from the boathouse, prosecutors contended.

Losing the drowning evidence "seriously hurts, if not destroys, our theory of first-degree murder in this case,"

Bilkovic told Danielson at an April 7 hearing on the original motion to dismiss.

At the same hearing, however, Bilkovic argued that all of the evidence against Unger needs to be considered. That evidence included: Florence Unger wanted a divorce and Mark Unger desperately wanted to save his marriage. She didn't want to spend a weekend with him alone, but only did so for her children. Just days before her death, Mark Unger was served with questions from her divorce attorneys that he may have considered an assault on his character. In those interrogatories, Unger was asked about his drug habit, a gambling problem and about what happened to some of the couple's money.

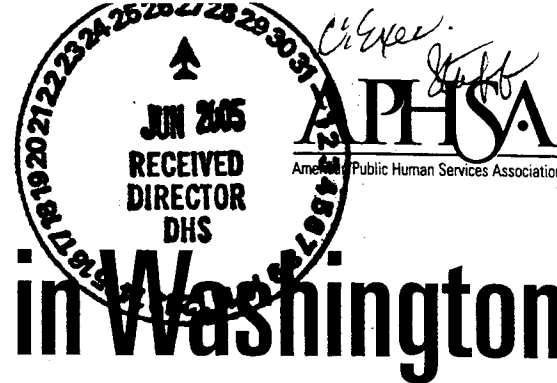
Prosecutors have argued that evidence, plus testimony that Unger behaved suspiciously the morning his wife was found lying face down in six inches of water, proves their case.

Harrison said the death could have been an accident.

Executive Staff
Karen Stock

(from Marianne Udow)

This Week



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Hearing Examines Drug Payment Reform Options

On June 22, the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee held a hearing titled "Medicaid Prescription Drugs: Examining Options for Payment Reform." The hearing's focus was the Congressional Budget Office's December 2004 report, *Medicaid's Reimbursements to Pharmacies for Prescription Drugs and the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System* (AHCCCS, the Arizona Medicaid program). Among the witnesses were Douglas Holtz-Eakin, director of the Congressional Budget Office, and Anthony Rodgers, director of AHCCCS. Rodgers said that AHCCCS keeps prescription drugs costs lower through a disease management program for members with diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and others; limiting quantities with early refill edits and maximum monthly quantities; prior authorization procedures; and step therapy/treatment guidelines that search for evidence of failure to achieve treatment outcomes with generic and over-the-counter drugs. Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Ga.), chair of the subcommittee, believes that there can be a consensus on changes to prescription drug pricing and that "generic drugs have a critical role to play in containing soaring drug costs." Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), the ranking member, said Medicaid accounts for 15 percent of U.S. spending on prescription drugs and that with its purchasing power, Medicaid should get the best discount. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) said the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) must improve its efforts to obtain accurate drug pricing data from the pharmaceutical industry and monitor the resulting database. Other witnesses cited the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study, *Medicaid Drug Rebate Program: Inadequate Oversight Raises Concerns about Rebates Paid to States*, which reviewed the current manufacturer-reported prices and price determination methods. GAO recommends that CMS should issue updated guidance on manufacturer price determination methods and price definitions and should implement systematic oversight of manufacturer methods and a plan to ensure the accuracy of reported prices and rebates to states. The study is available at <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-850T>.

Tennessee Finance Commissioner Ties Consent Decrees to Medicaid Problems

On June 21, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property held a hearing to examine H.R. 1229, the Federal Consent Decree Fairness Act. Subcommittee Chair Lamar Smith (R-Texas) noted that the purpose of the act is to allow government entities to revisit consent decrees in federal court. Subcommittee members attending the hearing were Reps. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.),

and Maxine Waters (D-Calif.). Among the witnesses were David Goetz, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, and Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), who introduced H.R. 1229 last March 10. Goetz focused on the problems that current consent decrees are creating in allowing reforms in Tennessee's Medicaid program, TennCare, noting that the consent decree under which TennCare operates precludes implementation of cost-savings measures such as an effective prior authorization pharmacy program and effective managed care. Goetz also said that because of the consent decree's severe restrictions on TennCare, disenrollments have become necessary to cut costs. Other witnesses noted consent decrees take power away from publicly accountable public officials and give it to the attorneys charged with litigating the decrees. Rep. Smith noted that the legislation enjoys support among some civil liberties attorneys. Rep. Berman countered with the assertion that the bill would force consent decrees to be re-litigated every four years. In questioning the panel, Rep. Waters noted that many Los Angeles services, including the child welfare system, currently operate under consent decrees. Witness testimony is available at <http://judiciary.house.gov/hearings.aspx?ID=114>.

TANF Extension Introduced in the House

On June 22, Rep. Wally Herger (R-Calif.), chair of the House Ways and Means Human Resources Subcommittee, introduced legislation (H.R. 3021) to extend the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program through September 30, 2005. The legislation would also extend authorization for the 10 percent transfer to the Social Services Block Grant, supplemental grants to states, the TANF contingency fund, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Abstinence Education, grants to the territories, and child welfare waiver authority. Unlike previous extensions, it does not include transitional medical assistance. That program will be included in similar legislation to be addressed by the Energy and Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction. The present short-term extension expires on June 30, 2005.

HHS, HUD Appropriations Bills Move through House

On June 23, the House passed Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending legislation for fiscal year 2006. The measure was almost identical to that passed by the Appropriations Committee on June 16 and the panel's subcommittee on June 9 (see *This Week*, June 10). It includes \$459.5 billion in mandatory spending and \$142.514 billion in discretionary spending. The Senate has yet to take up similar legislation. On June 21, the House Appropriations Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary,

District of Columbia Subcommittee approved FY 2006 spending for programs under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The measure provided overall HUD funding at \$37.5 billion, \$1.54 billion above the FY 2005 level and \$4.32 billion above the administration's request. The full committee also restored a reduction of \$250 million to the Community Development Block Grant that had been made by the subcommittee (see *This Week*, June 17).

Senate Subcommittee Approves Agriculture Appropriations Bill

On June 21, the Senate Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee approved a FY 2006 spending bill of nearly \$100.2 billion for the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration. The bill includes funding increases for both the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The FSP would be funded at \$40.7 billion, \$5.6 billion above last year and the same as both the administration's request and the House-approved amount. The bill reportedly assumes approval of the administration's budget request to allow certain otherwise-ineligible military families to receive food stamps by excluding special pay for deployment in combat areas. WIC would be funded at \$5.257 billion; child nutrition programs at \$12.412 billion; the Commodity Assistance Program at \$179.935 million; and the Bill Emerson and Mickey Leland Hunger Fellowships through the Congressional Hunger Center at \$2.5 million. More information is available at <http://appropriations.senate.gov/>.

House Bill Eyes Foster Care Maintenance Payments

On June 21, Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.) introduced H.R. 3008, the Fair Access Foster Care Act of 2005. The legislation would amend Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and permit foster care maintenance payments to be made to private, for-profit child-placement or child-care agencies on behalf of a child residing in a child-care institution. Current law allows payments only to non-profit child-placement and child-care agencies. Full legislative language is available at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Bill Would Require States to Report Companies With Employees on Medicaid

On June 22, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Sen. Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), and Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) introduced the Health Care Accountability Act (S. 1286), which would require states to report annually employers with 50 or more employees who receive Medicaid and other federally funded health coverage. Data from 15 states already requiring disclosure of such employers indicate Arkansas-based Wal-Mart Stores Inc., as the employer with the greatest number of employees who receive taxpayer-funded health care. Based on these states' data, Kennedy said taxpayers are underwriting \$210 million in health care costs for employers, including \$61 million in Florida, \$47 million in Tennessee, \$32 million in California, and \$3 million in Massachusetts. The bill's sponsors say they hope to stimulate a larger debate about the affordability of health care and what they say are employers' apparent deliberate attempts to underwrite profits by shifting employees' health costs to taxpayers. More information is available at http://corzine.senate.gov/press_office/record.cfm?id=239335.

ACF Awards Head Start Innovation Grants

On June 21, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced its Head Start Innovation and Improvement Project grant awards. The purpose of the grants is to provide support for children and families in Head Start and help close educational gaps between low-income children and their peers. The four grants, totaling \$2.1 million, include an award to the Missouri Department of Social Services to develop a statewide plan to address the effects on young children of having an incarcerated father. Additional grants include a project to address the needs of families in which a parent suffers from depression and a program to provide a distance learning early education degree tailored to Spanish-speaking Head Start staff. More information is available on the ACF web site at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2005/Head_Start_IP_June_21.htm.

USDA Announces Farm Bill Forums Beginning in Nashville July 7

On June 17, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a series of forums over the next few months at which members of the public can speak on recommendations for the 2007 farm bill. This legislation, last renewed in 2002, covers federal nutrition programs in addition to farm support programs, and must be reauthorized in 2007. The announcement appeared in the June 17 *Federal Register* (70 FR 35221-35222) and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>. USDA has also posted a news release announcing Nashville as the site of the first forum on July 7, available at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_10B?contentidonly=true&contentid=2005/06/0215.xml. Additional locations and dates will be announced via future USDA web site releases. USDA will also accept written comments through December 30, 2005. These may be submitted electronically to FarmBill@usda.gov or by mailing them to Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Farm Bill, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-3355. APHSA's detailed recommendations for reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program appear in *Crossroads II: New Directions in Social Policy*, available on the APHSA web site at <http://www.aphsa.org/Publications/Doc/crossroads2/Crossroads.pdf>.

Foster Care Caseflow Management Curriculum Released

On June 22, Fostering Results, a project of the Pew Charitable Trust, released a national curriculum for caseflow management in juvenile dependency cases involving foster care. The goal of the curriculum is to improve the juvenile justice system's ability to oversee the movement of dependency cases involving foster care through the entire juvenile justice system to shorten the time needed for children to reach an appropriate permanent placement. More information is available at www.fosteringresults.org.



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